

Jason G. H. Londt: A giant of South African entomology

Torsten Dikow¹, John Midgley^{2,3}

1 *National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, USA* **2** *KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Department Natural Sciences, 237 Jabu Ndlovu Street, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, 3201, South Africa* **3** *Department of Zoology and Entomology, Rhodes University, Makhanda, 6139, South Africa*

Corresponding author: John Midgley (johnmidge@gmail.com)

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Abstract

To celebrate the 80th birthday of Jason G.H. Londt, we present a collection of articles in his honour. This introduction includes a summary of Jason's life and career, an overview of the articles in the Festschrift, lists of his scientific and popular publications and a list of species named in his honour. Jason's contribution to Mecoptera and Asilidae research in the Afrotropics is discussed, highlighting the impressive contributions he has made to the taxonomy, biology and ecology in both groups.

Keywords

Asilidae, Bibliography, biography, Bittacidae, personalia, species descriptions

Jason G. H. Londt has made a notable impact on South African and International Entomology over a career of more than 50 years. 2023 marks Jason's 80th birthday and it is fitting to publish a Festschrift in honour of this milestone. This Festschrift recognizes the outstanding contributions that Jason has made to entomological research on flies, especially assassin or robber flies (Diptera, Asilidae), on hangingflies (Mecoptera, Bittacidae), and field collections of insects, primarily in South Africa. This issue includes nine articles celebrating Jason's career by authors from three continents and five countries.

Brief biographical sketch

Jason Gilbert Hayden Londt (Figs 1, 2) was born in Johannesburg, Transvaal [now Gauteng], South Africa on April 1st, 1943, where he attended Parkview Junior, Parkview Senior and Parktown Boys' High Schools. Jason received all of his academic training at Rhodes University in Grahamstown [now Makhanda], Cape Province [now Eastern Cape], South Africa with research on ticks (graduating with BSc 1968; BSc Honours 1969; MSc 1971; PhD 1974), where he was an excellent student (B. Wilmot pers. comm. 2023). He also developed an interest in Mecoptera and started his taxonomic research on this group while he was a student. During 1970, Jason undertook some lecturing in entomology (sharing a vacant post with B. Wilmot) in order to bring in some income and to assist with the teaching load. During 1971–1973, Jason held the position of Research Officer at the newly established Tick Research Unit, Department of Zoology and Entomology, Rhodes University, during which time he also assisted in the teaching of Entomology. In 1974, Jason was awarded the University of London 'Esmé Fairbairn Post-doctoral Fellowship', and conducted biological research on various species of British ticks including *Ixodes trianguliceps* under Prof. Don R. Arthur, head of the Department of Zoology at Kings College, London, UK, some time was also devoted to taxonomic work on Afro-tropical Mecoptera at the Natural History Museum, London. During this period, he also collected insects in Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Following his one-year studies in London, Jason accepted a post as a Senior Professional Officer at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (1975) in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa, where he continued to work on the biology and ecology of southern African cattle ticks (Ixodidae), mostly of the Blue Tick (*Boophilus decoloratus*) and the Red-legged Tick (*Rhipicephalus evertsi*). In 1976, Jason took up the post of Assistant Director of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum [then the Natal Museum] in Pietermaritzburg, Natal [now KwaZulu-Natal], South Africa. This is where he commenced his research on the assassin flies (Asilidae, Fig. 3). During the 17 years when Jason was Assistant Director, he also undertook all the editorial work on the museum's scientific publications. Jason became Director of the same museum in 1994 and retired from that position on 30 April 2003. After retirement, Jason served a 6-month post-retirement contract as Acting Director while the museum council appointed his successor. Jason was an active member of the Pietermaritzburg Rotary Club from 1989 to 2018, serving as President in 2000/01. He continues to this day to visit the museum to meet with staff, study and add flies and other insects to the collection, and writes a column entitled 'Concrete Jungle' for the local newspaper, The Witness. Jason has been married to his wife Ann for 55 years and they have three children, Hilary, Cynthia and Brendan, and six grandchildren.

Brief summary of research impact

Jason has contributed a remarkable amount to entomology in South Africa and the world. During a career of 51 years, Jason published 137 scientific papers and book



Figures 1–4. **1** Jason next to a quiver tree (*Aloidendron dichotomum*, Asphodelaceae) following a successful day in the field at Tierberg Nature Reserve, Keimoes, Northern Cape, South Africa (28°43'01"S, 20°59'48"E, 2004-02-05). Asilidae species (6) collected at this site on this day: *Acasilus tigrimontis* Londt, 2005, *Afroholopogon mauros* Londt, 2005, *Afroholopogon pardosoros* Londt, 2005, *Alcimus* sp., *Lycostommyia albifacies* (Hermann, 1907), and *Trichoura pardeos* Londt & Dikow, 2016. Photo by T. Dikow 2004 (with Jason's camera) **2** Jason and Torsten Dikow at Doreen Clark Nature Reserve in Hilton, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (29°34'52"S, 30°17'25"E, 2019-09-15). No Asilidae was collected on this day at this site. Photo by A. Cabrero 2019 **3** assassin fly *Melouromyia natalensis* (Ricardo, 1919), one of two species in the genus *Melouromyia* Londt, 2002, photographed by Jason in his garden in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Photo by J. Londt 2013 **4** two KwaZulu-Natal Museum dipterists, Jason Londt (Director, left) and Brian Stuckenberg (Director Emeritus, right), talking about flies. Photo by T. Dikow 2000.

chapters, 29 popular articles and six popular books (see Appendix 1, publication list, below), collected specimens in ten African, four European and one Central American country and assembled a collection of over 21,700 Asilidae and 65,000 insect specimens, almost all housed at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Throughout his career at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum, he had to balance his research with the administrative demands of his positions, further highlighting his research productivity. As a measure of the esteem in which his colleagues held him, 32 Diptera species in 17 families, four other insects in three orders, and two Oligochaetes have been named in his honour (Table 1). A further five species are named in his honour in this Festschrift.

Table 1. List of species named in honour of Jason Londt.

Order	Family	Species
Insects		
Diptera	Acroceridae	<i>Acrocera londti</i> Barraclough, 1984: 64
	Asilidae	<i>Asilella londti</i> Lehr, 1989: 233
		<i>Cerdistus londti</i> Lavigne, Suludere & Stevens, 2019: 245
		<i>Damalis londti</i> Scarbrough, 2005: 150
		<i>Lasiocnemus londti</i> Dikow, 2007: 69
		<i>Microphontes jasonlondti</i> Markee & Dikow, 2018: 210
		<i>Neolophonotus londti</i> Bosák & Hradský, 2011: 704
		<i>Oligopogon londti</i> Geller-Grimm & Hradský, 2003: 173
		<i>Philodicus londti</i> Joseph & Parui, 1991: 251
		<i>Saropogon londti</i> Parui, 1999: 216
		Camillidae
	Diopsidae	<i>Teloglabrus londti</i> Feijen, 1983: 127
	Dolichopodidae	<i>Medetera londti</i> Grichanov, 2000: 418
		<i>Pseudargyrochlamys londti</i> Grichanov, 2020: 98
		<i>Pseudargyrochlamys jasoni</i> (Grichanov, 2004: 110)
	Drosophilidae	<i>Leucophenga londti</i> Bächli, Vilela & McEvey, 2005: 32
	Hybotidae	<i>Acarterus londti</i> Sinclair, 1996: 224
	Muscidae	<i>Atherigona londti</i> Muller, 2015: 882
	Mycetophilidae	<i>Mycomya londti</i> Väisänen, 1994: 18
	Neriidae	<i>Chaetonerius londti</i> Barraclough, 1993: 8
	Phoridae	<i>Aenigmatistes londti</i> Disney, 1991: 361
		<i>Woodiphora londti</i> Disney, 2004: 97
	Platystomatidae	<i>Agrochira londti</i> (Whittington, 2003: 165)
	Sarcophagidae	<i>Sarcophaga (Liosarcophaga) londtiana</i> (Lehrer, 1996: 60)
		<i>Sarcophaga (Nuzzaciella) londti</i> (Lehrer, 1994: 18)
	Syrphidae	<i>Syritta londti</i> Lyneborg & Barkemeyer, 2005: 160
	Tabanidae	<i>Philoliche londti</i> Chainey, 1983: 465
	Tachinidae	<i>Austrosolieria londti</i> Cerretti & O'Hara, 2016: 288
		<i>Winthemia londti</i> Inclán & Cerretti, 2016
	Therevidae	<i>Orthactia londti</i> Lyneborg, 1988: 552
	Vermileonidae	<i>Vermipardus londti</i> Stuckenberg, 1995: 234
		<i>Vermilyn timeria</i> Stuckenberg, 1996: 198
Hemiptera	Notonectidae	<i>Anisops londti</i> Truxal, 1990: 90
	Tingidae	<i>Cochlochila (Kibongoto) londti</i> Rodrigues, 1982: 259
Lepidoptera	Pterophoridae	<i>Gypsochares londti</i> Ustjuzhanin & Kovtunovich, 2010: 701
Orthoptera	Tridactylidae	<i>Xya londti</i> Günther, 1982: 339
Other Invertebrates		
Haplotaxida	Microchaetidae	<i>Proandricus jasoni</i> Plisko, 1992: 362
		<i>Proandricus londti</i> Plisko, 1993: 204
Taxa described this Festschrift		
Diptera	Asilidae	<i>Anypodetus londti</i> Dikow & Dubus, 2023: 189
	Empididae	<i>Wiedemannia londti</i> Sinclair, 2023: 142
	Syrphidae	<i>Amphoterus londti</i> Midgley, Bellingan & Jordaens, 2023: 158
	Therevidae	<i>Neotherevella londti</i> Winterton, Irwin & Mortelmans, 2023: 120
Mecoptera	Bittacidae	<i>Bittacus londti</i> Midgley, 2023: 98

Research on Bittacidae

Jason published his first scientific article, the description of *Bittacus tjederi* Londt, 1970, on the Mecoptera (Londt 1970) and, despite his career focused on the Asilidae (his publications on Asilidae outnumber publications on Mecoptera five to one), continued publishing on Mecoptera for the next 37 years, until 2007. During his career, he published 20 articles and book chapters, 13 on the taxonomy of Mecoptera and seven on their distribution, biology and ecology. His treatment of the Bittacidae in “A catalogue of Afrotropical Mecoptera” (Londt 1994a) remains the most thorough publication on the Afrotropical fauna and his key to the southern African species in “The Mecoptera of Southern Africa” (Londt 1972) is the only identification resource for the Afrotropics.

The majority of Jason’s work focused on the Afrotropical Mecoptera, where he described 16 species, though he did also describe one species from the Neotropics (Londt and Byers 1974). The Afrotropical Mecoptera are represented by a single family, the Bittacidae, and three genera, one of which, the monotypic *Afrobittacus* Londt, 1994, was described by Jason. *Anomalobittacus* Kimmins, 1928 is also monotypic, leaving the majority of the Afrotropical diversity (51 species) in *Bittacus* Latreille, 1805. With two monotypic genera, articles treating the entire family are more practical for the Afrotropics and, in most cases, this was Jason’s approach. Of the 53 valid species known from the Afrotropics, Jason has described 14, or 26% of the known diversity. The only authors to describe a comparable number are Longinos Navás who described 13 valid *Bittacus* species and Peter Esben-Petersen who described seven valid species. No other author has described more than three Afrotropical Mecoptera species. Of the 17 Mecoptera species described by Jason, only two have proven to be junior synonyms, both from his early work (Londt 1972) and both synonymized by Jason himself (Londt 1994a).

While most of Jason’s publications were taxonomic, he also published on the fauna of specific regions, such as Malawi (Londt 1981) and Mkomazi in Tanzania (Londt and van Noort 1999), an atlas of the Mecoptera of KwaZulu-Natal (Londt 1995b) and four general articles on the distribution, biology and ecology of Mecoptera. As in his research on the Asilidae, his observations of this group have provided insights that are uncommon in many Afrotropical insect groups.

Taxonomic Asilidae research

Jason joined the Natal Museum (NMSA) in Pietermaritzburg as Assistant Director in 1976. Although he had not published on Diptera yet, the then director and preeminent dipterist Brian Stuckenberg (Kirk-Spriggs 2012, Fig. 4) asked Jason to focus his attention on Asilidae in part because a review of the southern African fauna had just been published by Harold Oldroyd from the Natural History Museum in London, UK (Oldroyd 1974, see also below).

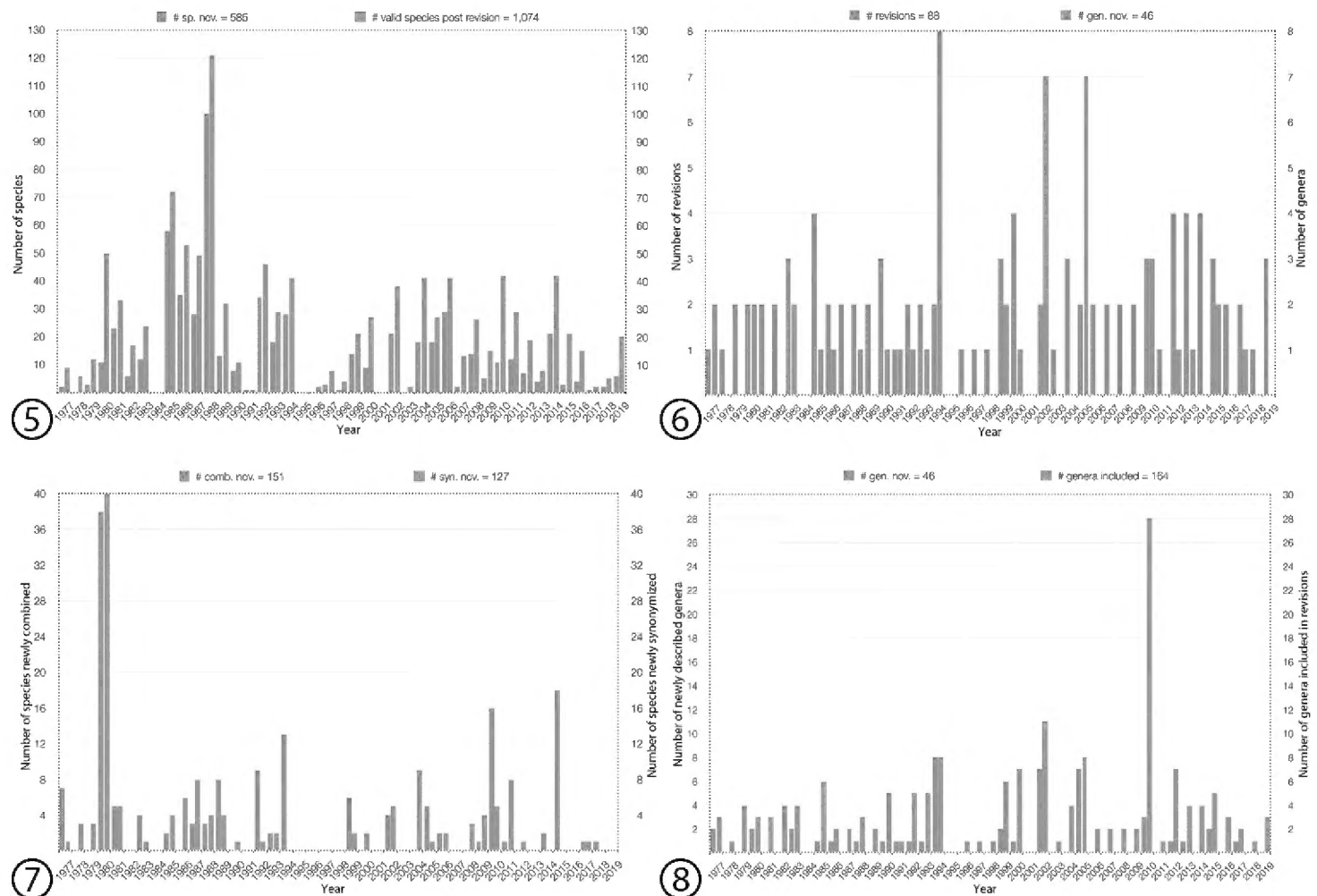
Jason published his first article on assassin flies, focusing on the genus *Choerades* Walker, 1851, in 1977 (Londt 1977). This article started his series entitled “Afrotropical Asilidae” to which he added 32 additional manuscripts with the final one appearing on the genus *Habropogon* Loew, 1847 in 2000 (Londt 2000). This remarkable series of papers was (1) exclusively published in the “Annals of the Natal Museum” (renamed to “African Invertebrates” in 2001), (2) authored solely by Jason as the single author, and (3) included, with three exceptions, only taxonomic revisionary studies. To these 33 taxonomic “Afrotropical Asilidae” publications, Jason added an amazing 55 other taxonomic revisionary studies published in a number of different entomological journals but chiefly in “African Invertebrates”. His taxonomic work focused on genera distributed in southern Africa or the entire Afrotropical Region with his last publication appearing in 2019 on the genus *Astochia* Becker in Becker and Stein 1913 (Londt 2019). In a total of 88 revisions, Jason described 585 new Asilidae species (Fig. 5: 580 Afrotropical, 4 Oriental (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), 1 Palearctic (Iran)), 46 new genera (Fig. 6: 45 Afrotropical, 1 Oriental), newly combined 151 species, and newly synonymized 127 species of Asilidae (Fig. 7). These revisions included more than 1,000 species (Fig. 5, most with high-quality re-descriptions).

The new species descriptions are spread among 70 genera from ten of the 12 currently recognized subfamilies recorded for the Afrotropics. The only two subfamilies known from the Afrotropical Region that Jason did not describe new species in are Leptogastrinae and Ommatiinae. Remarkably, Jason has only a single junior synonym in the Asilidae to his name to this day, which he himself established in 2015 when synonymizing *Notiophoria africana* Londt, 1977, which was described in his first article, with *Notiophoria coerulescens* Macquart, 1834 when it was newly combined with *Notiophoria* Londt, 1977 (Londt 2015).

The vast majority of new taxa were described in Asilinae with 247 new species and 15 new genera followed by Stenopogoninae with 95 new species and 10 new genera.

The highest number of new species in a single manuscript was published in 1988 in the *Neolophonotus comatus* group with 98 new species (Londt 1988, Fig. 5). The highest number of new genera was published in 1994 with seven new genera of small Stenopogoninae (Londt 1994b, now mostly placed in Brachyrhopalinae, Fig. 6) plus the genus *Afroholopogon* (Londt 1994b) closely followed by the two comprehensive studies on the Asilinae with seven new genera in Londt (2002b) and six in Londt (2005) (Fig. 6). In one of his earlier articles, Jason cleaned up the complex taxonomic history of the genus *Pegesimallus* Loew, 1858 (with junior synonyms *Cenopogon* Wulp, 1898, *Lagodias* Loew, 1858, and *Neolaparus* Williston, 1889) in which he described 10 new species, two new genera, synonymized 39 previously described species, and newly combined 37 species with *Pegesimallus* (Londt 1980, Fig. 7).

Jason usually included single genera in his manuscripts, but when he reviewed the fauna of a particular region he included several genera. The largest of these was his review of the fauna of The Gambia, based on 298 Gambian Asilidae collected by William F. Snow between 1974–1977 and deposited at Oxford University Museum of Natural History, where a total of 28 genera were dealt with in a single publication (Fig. 8) (Londt 2012).

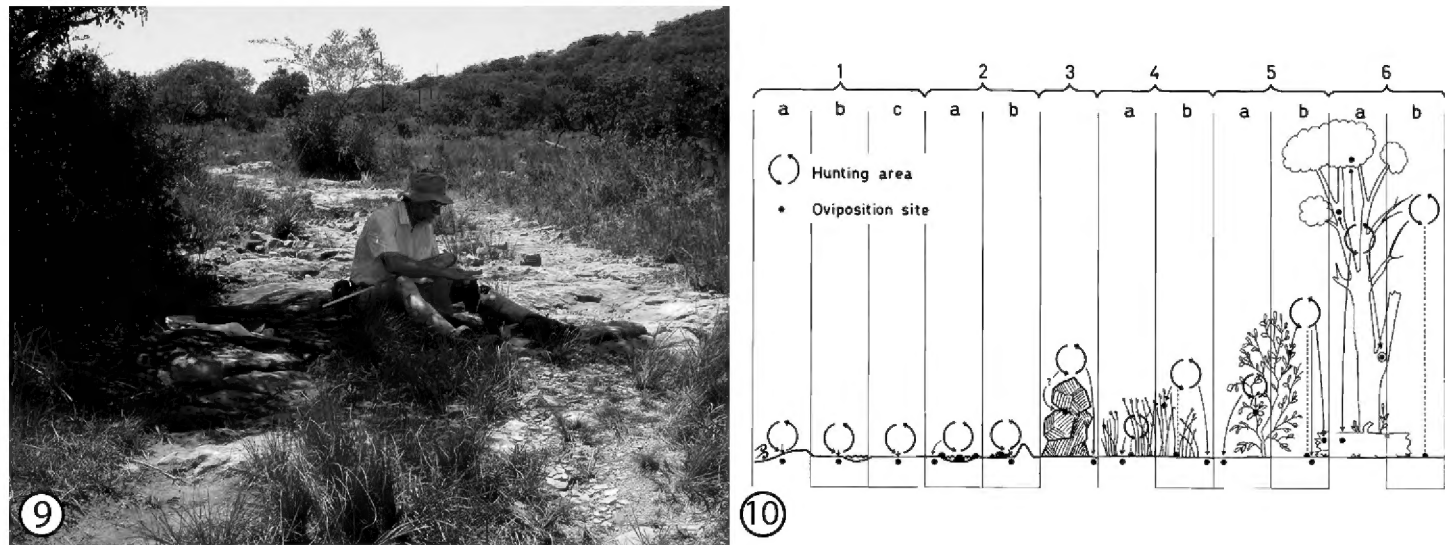


Figures 5–8. Graphical summary of 88 taxonomic revisionary studies published by Jason Londt on Asilidae between 1977–2019 **5** number of new species described and valid species recognized **6** number of revisions and number of new genera **7** number of new generic combinations and number of new junior synonyms **8** number of new genera and number of genera included in each revision (note: total number of 164 encompasses genera included in multiple revisions).

Jason published his taxonomic Asilidae research primarily as the sole author (78 taxonomic revisionary studies) with ten articles co-authored by four colleagues (six with T. Dikow, two with R. Copeland, and one each with R. Vieira and L. Tsacas).

Faunistic and biological Asilidae research

While Jason's taxonomic reviews and keys represent the core of his Asilidae research, he also used his expeditions to note biological data while collecting specimens in the field (Fig. 9). Jason published twelve articles that are not strictly taxonomic in nature and that contributed immensely to understanding the biology, ecology and diversity of (Afrotropical) Asilidae. His publication "Afrotropical Asilidae (Diptera) 26. Ethological observations, and a possible ecological classification based on habitats" (Londt 1994c) provided a summary of his extensive experience when observing and collecting assassin flies in the field. The unique perching and oviposition behaviours of many species are here compared and contrasted within six ecological categories and three oviposition strategies (Fig. 10). Prey specialization is also discussed based on predator-prey pairs in



Figures 9–10. **9** Jason reviewing the catch in the shade at Cumberland Nature Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (29°30'25"S, 30°30'23"E, 2004-01-13). Asilidae species (11) collected at this site on this day: *Afrostricus chiastoneurus* (Speiser, 1910), *Euscelidia brunnea* (Loew, 1858), *Laxenecera albicincta* (Loew, 1852), *Leptogaster carotenoides* (Tomasovic, 1999), *Ommatius senex* (Bromley, 1936), *Pegesimalus aulicus* (Wiedemann, 1828), *Philodicus tenuipes* (Loew, 1857), *Promachus amastrus* (Walker, 1849), *Rhipidocephala* sp., *Scylaticus costalis* (Wiedemann, 1819), and *Stichopogon punctum* (Loew, 1851). Photo by T. Dikow 2004 **10** ecological categories of Afrotropical Asilidae from Londt 1994: fig. 2. Numbers – primary divisions; letters – subdivisions; circling arrows – hunting area; dots – possible oviposition sites.

the collection, a subject on which Jason would publish further papers. The (Afrotropical) assassin fly prey is further analyzed in two articles entitled, “Predation of Asilidae by Asilidae” (Londt 1995a) and “An analysis of 2000 prey records” (Londt 2006). One can imagine that the ‘cannibalistic’ behaviour of preying on your own ‘kind’ is not that prevalent, but the analysis of 100+ field-caught assassin fly predator-prey pairs provides a first set of data points. Jason showed that true cannibalism does not occur in Afrotropical Asilidae, with most predator/prey relationships being between genera (Londt 1995a). In general, assassin flies are not that specific about their prey choice, but some Afrotropical genera are and Jason summarized the available prey data in the two mentioned publications and on honeybees (Londt 1993) and butterflies (Londt 1999). On the reverse, Jason was also involved in research on predator avoidance such as through hypertrophied hindwings in Nemopteridae (spoonwings, Neuroptera) that are postulated to reduce attack success by assassin flies (Picker et al. 1992). The female oviposition strategies, egg and early instar larval morphology, and other biological data were analyzed for *Millenarius dichætus* (Hull, 1967) (Asilinae) (Londt and Harris 1987) and *Damalis femoralis* Ricardo, 1925 (Trigonimiminae) (Londt 1991) along with scanning electron micrographs and illustrations of the eggs and larvae.

Jason also published three interesting faunistic studies. The first was based on material in the NMSA collected by Dr J. Brauns in and around Willowmore, Eastern Cape, South Africa between 1902–1929. It established that the habitats in the southernmost extent of the Nama Karoo harbour an incredible species diversity of assassin flies with 62 species in 27 genera recorded (Londt 1998). These numbers need to be increased to 63 species in 28 genera based on a unique specimen in the United States

National Museum (USNM) of the genus *Ammodaimon* Londt, 1985 collected by J. Brauns at Willowmore in 1903. Jason showed an early understanding of the potential of databases in this work and had GBIF existed at the time, it is likely that he would have included the USNM data and those of other museums. This study provides a measure of species richness for the semi-arid Nama Karoo and no comparable data are currently available for arid or semi-arid environments anywhere else in the world. The other two faunistic articles are much stronger in the scientific technique applied and closer to home as they focus on the fauna of Queen Elizabeth Park (Londt 2002a) in Pietermaritzburg and the Jacana Eco Estate (Londt 2020) in Hilton, which is just north of the same city. Both are year-long studies of grassland-inhabiting assassin fly species collected through standardized sweeping and walking the same paths to visually locate flies. At Queen Elizabeth Park, 20 species from 15 genera (including *Millenarius* Londt, 2005, which was collected for the first time during this study and later described) representing eight subfamilies were recorded. At Jacana Eco Estate, 18 species from 13 genera representing six subfamilies were recorded. These studies provide insight into the species richness of assassin flies in grasslands within South Africa and no other comparable studies for this habitat type exist.

The “Manual of Afrotropical Diptera” project, spearheaded by Ashley Kirk-Spriggs and Bradley Sinclair (Kirk-Spriggs and Sinclair 2017), came at a time when many of the Afrotropical Asilidae genera had already been reviewed and who would be better suited to summarize our knowledge than Jason himself? The chapter on Asilidae (Londt and Dikow 2017) includes 148 genera accounting for 1,684 species, which makes it the most diverse Diptera family in the Afrotropics. Today, this species count has risen slightly to 1,704 valid species and many more will be discovered and need to be described in the future. This book chapter provides also, for the first time, a single identification key to all known genera and will be a valuable resource for the study of assassin flies for years to come.

Fieldwork in search of Asilidae

Almost half of new species described by Jason are based on his own collecting throughout South Africa (the NMSA has 279 Asilidae holotypes collected and described by Jason). The fauna of this vast country is particularly well-known because Jason exhaustively covered every corner of it to collect specimens since starting work at the NMSA in 1976 (Fig. 11, see also below). Asilidae specimens collected by Jason since 1966 are in the NMSA collection (though some from his student years were deposited at the Albany Museum, Makhanda) and he is adding new ones to this day. It is obviously difficult to compare entomologists collecting throughout their careers, but we believe that there are very few, if any, other South African entomologists who have covered the entire country as densely as Jason has (Fig. 11). Amazingly, the entire NMSA Diptera collection has been databased and holds a staggering 42,000+ specimens of Asilidae in its drawers of which 21,700+ are assassin flies collected by

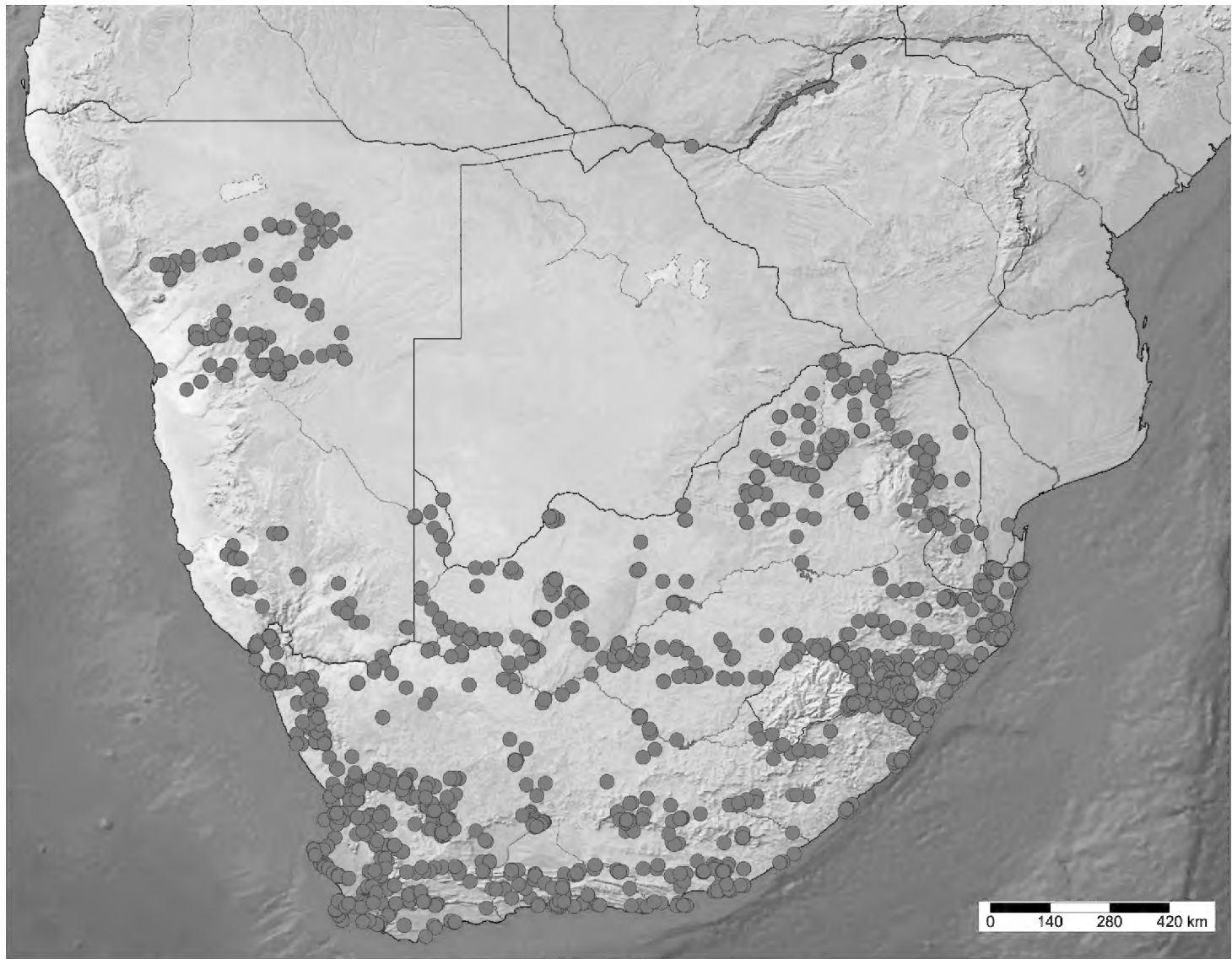


Figure 11. Map of southern Africa with collecting localities at which Jason Londt collected Asilidae (and other flies/insects). Based on published records and NMSA collection database. Map created in SimpleMappr (Shorthouse 2010).

Jason and of which 18,700+ are from within South Africa alone. Figs 12–17 show Jason in a number of habitats throughout South Africa in search of assassin flies. Jason collected almost every single genus of assassin flies known from South Africa. In some instances, such as *Bana* Londt, 1991, he collected the genus in Namibia but did not collect the only known species from South Africa, *Bana madiba* Londt, 2013. In other instances, such as *Zelamyia* Londt, 2005 or a few Ommatiinae genera, Jason has not been at the right time at the right place to encounter these genera in the field.

Jason also collected Asilidae, Diptera in general, and other insects on extended field trips in Malawi (1980, 1987; 850+ Asilidae specimens), Namibia (1983, 1984; 1,250+ Asilidae specimens), Côte d'Ivoire (1989; 240+ Asilidae specimens), Swaziland [now Eswatini] (1991; 125+ Asilidae specimens), Kenya (1992; 315+ Asilidae specimens) and Costa Rica (2010; 110+ Asilidae specimens in USNM). These expeditions added immensely valuable material to the NMSA collection from other Afrotropical countries (Fig. 18). A single specimen of *Rhabdogaster* was also collected at Victoria Falls, Zambia, on a vacation in 2008.



Figures 12–17. **12** Jason catching flies at Cumberland Nature Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (29°30'25"S, 30°30'23"E, 2004-01-13). For a list of captured species, see Fig. 9 captions. Photo by T. Dikow 2004 **13** Jason sweeping vegetation at Mhlopheni Nature Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (29°01'13"S, 30°25'01"E, 2004-02-13). Asilidae species (15) collected at this site on this day: *Afroestricus chiastoneurus* (Speiser, 1910), *Astochia armata* (Becker, 1909), *Connomyia leonina* (Engel, 1932), *Connomyia varipennis* (Ricardo, 1925), *Gonioscelis zulu* Londt, 2004, *Heligmonevra* sp., *Hoplistomerus nobilis* (Loew, 1858), *Lasiocnemus lugens* (Loew, 1858), *Laxenecera albicincta* (Loew, 1852), *Melouromyia natalensis* (Ricardo, 1919), *Ommatius flavipes* (Loew, 1858), *Ommatius senex* (Bromley, 1936), *Pegesimallus aulicus* (Wiedemann, 1828), *Rhipidocephala* sp., and *Stichopogon punctum* (Loew, 1851). Photo by T. Dikow 2004 **14** Jason sweeping grass at Doorndraai Dam Nature Reserve, Limpopo, South Africa (24°17'41"S, 28°46'41"E, 2005-02-16). Asilidae species (8) collected at this site on this day: *Ancylorhynchus fulvicollis* (Bigot, 1879), *Emphysomera pallidapex* (Bigot, 1891), *Euscelidia procula* Walker, 1849, *Lasiocnemus lugens* (Loew, 1858), *Laxenecera albicincta* (Loew, 1852), *Ommatius* sp., *Pegesimallus* sp., and *Philodicus fraterculus* (Walker, 1855). Photo by T. Dikow 2005 **15** Jason admires a giraffe while collecting at Messina Nature Reserve, Limpopo, South Africa (22°24'54"S, 30°05'12"E, 2005-02-14–15). Asilidae species (9) collected at this site on this day: *Alcimus* sp., *Anypodetus arachnoides* Oldroyd, 1974, *Hoplistomerus nobilis* Loew, 1858, *Philodicus dubius* Ricardo, 1921, *Philodicus tenuipes* (Loew, 1857), *Pegesimallus laticornis* (Loew, 1858), *Stichopogon punctum* (Loew, 1851), *Trichardis apicalis* (Oldroyd, 1974), and *Trichardis testacea* (Macquart, 1838). Photo by T. Dikow 2005 **16** Jason and his field vehicle, a Toyota Hilux, at red Kalahari sand dunes near Keimoes, Northern Cape, South Africa (28°44'55"S, 20°46'11"E, 2004-02-04). Asilidae species (3) collected at this site on this day: *Laphystotes ariel* Londt, 2004, *Macroetra* sp., and *Sporadothrix gracilis* Hermann, 1907. Photo by T. Dikow 2004 **17** Jason at Tugela River mouth on the Indian Ocean coast, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (29°13'21"S, 31°30'22"E, 2019-09-19). No Asilidae was collected on this day at this site. Photo by T. Dikow 2019.

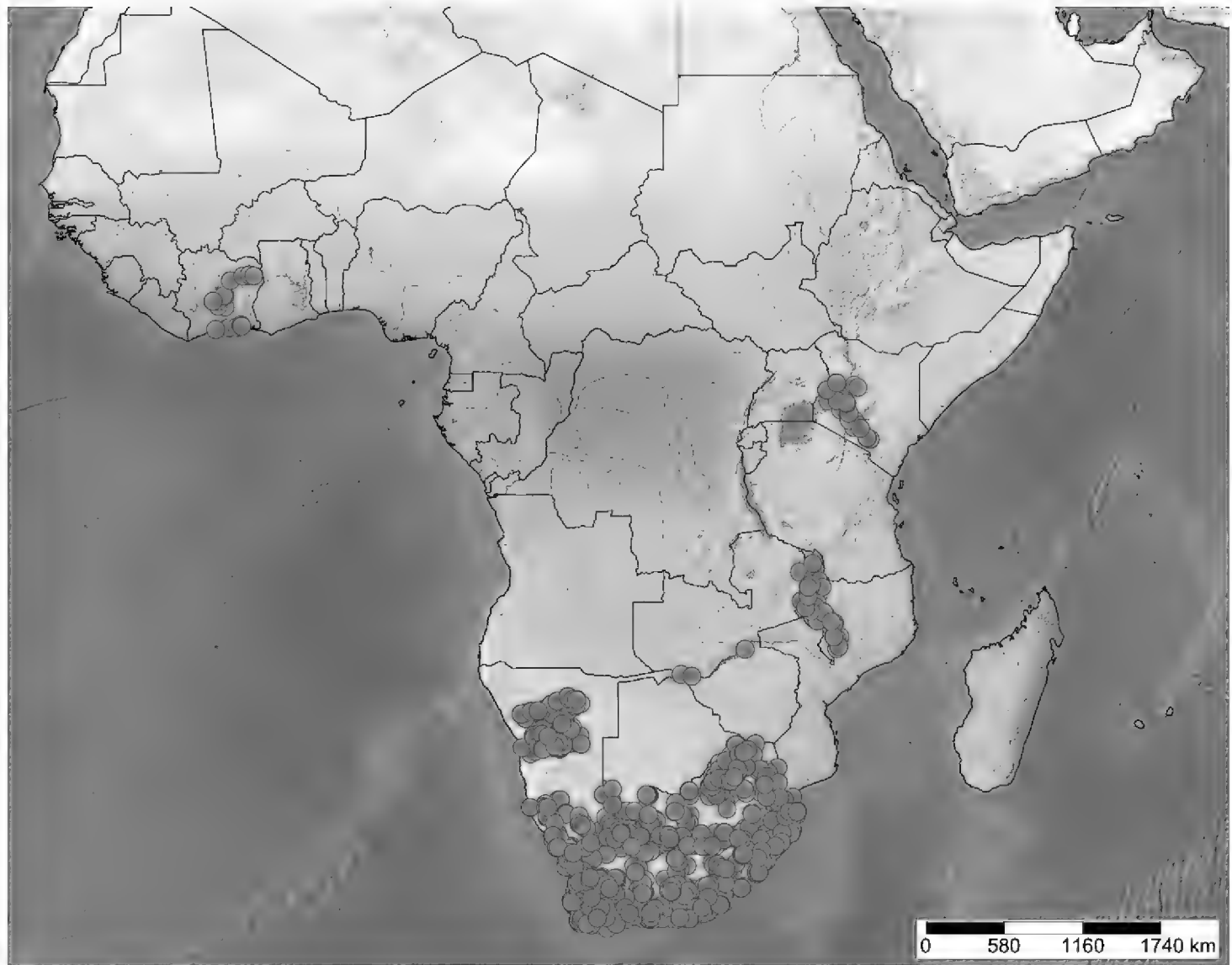


Figure 18. Map of the Afrotropical Region with localities where Jason Londt collected Asilidae (and other flies/insects). Based on published records and NMSA collection database. Map created in SimpleMappr (Shorthouse 2010).

The southern African Asilidae fauna

The fauna of assassin or robber flies of southern Africa is arguably one of the best-known of any region on the planet. That is in large part because of Jason's dedicated field-work and research on this fauna since 1977. This area with diverse habitats such as Mediterranean fynbos and macchia, Namib and Kalahari deserts, Mopane woodlands, subtropical coastal forests, high altitude mountain plateaus, savanna, and Succulent and Nama Karoo covers the countries Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique (south of the Zambesi river), Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

The southern African Asilidae fauna has received attention from European dipterists for over 240 years (Fig. 20). Johan Christian Fabricius described the first species, *Teratopomyia cyanea* (Fabricius, 1781), from 'Cap. bon. sp.' (*Promontorium bonae spei* = Cape of Good Hope) in South Africa (Fabricius 1781). Jason reviewed this species in 2009 (Londt 2009) and commented on its unique morphology and metallic blue-black colouration, which is unknown from any other Afrotropical Asilidae species. Christian R.W. Wiedemann (between 1819–1830), Justin P.M. Macquart (between 1834–1855), and Francis Walker (between 1849–1857) added 25, 32, and 26 still valid species, respectively (Fig. 20). The first comprehensive review of the fauna was published by F. Hermann Loew who in

This Award recognizes the most knowledgeable
Afrotropical Asilidae taxonomist
—present and past—

Jason G.H. Londt

for his contributions to the study of assassin flies
with a species named in his honour—

Microphontes jasonlondti



Microphontes jasonlondti Markee & Dikow, 2018

Holotype male – South Africa: Northern Cape: Renoster River, 18 km N Sutherland, 1290 m, 7 November 1998,
Karoo macchia, J.G.H. Londt & B. Londt – NMSA-DIP-4768

*Taxonomy and phylogeny of Asilidae –
honouring 40 years of Afrotropical research by Jason Londt*

9th International Congress of Dipterology, Windhoek, Namibia

27 November 2018

Figure 19. Commemorative award celebrating the career of Jason Londt presented at ICD9 in Windhoek, Namibia in 2018.

1860 published the *Die Dipteren-Fauna Südafrika's* (pages 56–170) recognizing 96 species (Loew 1860). Loew described a total of 64 still valid species between 1851–1863 from southern Africa (Fig. 20). In the 20th century, Gertrude Ricardo (between 1900–1925) described 50, Erich O. Engel (between 1925–1932) described 26, Stanley W. Bromley (between 1930–1952) added 25, Frank M. Hull (between 1958–1967) added 20, and

Harold Oldroyd (between 1966–1974) added 52 still valid species (Fig. 20). By the time of the publication of “An Introduction to the Robber Flies (Diptera: Asilidae) of Southern Africa” (Oldroyd 1974), the total number of valid species in Southern Africa stood at 480 after ~175 years of attention of which 208 were treated in detail by Oldroyd. Jason alone described 490 (481 sole, 9 co-authored) new species of Asilidae from southern Africa in less than a third of this time, which demonstrates the immense contribution he has made to dipterology and entomology in southern Africa (Fig. 20). Other contemporary authors who added species are Torsten Dikow with 27 species (between 2000–present, 5 co-authored with Jason), Aubrey Scarbrough with 9 (between 1996–2005) and Guy Tomasovic with 6 (between 1999–2013). Today, some 952 Asilidae species are recognised from southern Africa and thanks to Jason’s exceptional collecting efforts and detailed revisionary taxonomic publications these species can be easily identified.

Southern Africa is also very diverse in terms of genera of Asilidae. In total, 102 genera have been recorded to date of the 148 genera known from the Afrotropical Region. Of these, 45 genera are endemic to southern Africa and 18 are monotypic. Jason described 37 genera from southern Africa during his career of which 28 are endemic and 13 are monotypic. The numbers of endemic and monotypic genera might suggest that the actual species diversity has not been fully described. To some biologists it might seem that Jason was a splitter ‘overdescribing’ the southern African fauna. However, Jason conducted such comprehensive field-work in biologically diverse habitats (see above) that yielded beautifully pinned specimens with high-quality associated locality and habitat data that it is no surprise that new species have been discovered. Furthermore, Jason included useful identification keys in each of his taxonomic publications making the species recognition and identification for entomologists possible for generations to come. On the other hand, Jason did not tackle and publish on some diverse, world-wide genera such as *Microstylum* Macquart, 1838 (79 Afrotropical and 39 southern African species) or *Promachus* Loew, 1848 (97 Afrotropical and 21 southern African species) in which, no doubt, many more species will be discovered and need to be described in the future. The southern African Asilidae fauna is exceptionally diverse and new species will be discovered by studying already available specimens at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum or by new fieldwork.

Summary of Asilidae research

Jason presented his research on Asilidae at several meetings of the “Entomological Society of Southern Africa” as evidenced by published abstracts (e.g., Londt 1987, 2001). Jason also participated in the “International Congresses of Dipterology” in Guelph, Canada (1994, ICD3), Oxford, UK (1998, ICD4), San José, Costa Rica (2010, ICD7), and Windhoek, Namibia (2018, ICD9) to share his research with the international dipterological community (e.g. Londt 2010b, 2010a). Jason was elected an Honorary Member of the “International Congresses of Dipterology” at the Windhoek meeting in 2018. He is the 2nd African dipterist to receive these honours following his close colleague Brian Stuckenberg, who was elected an Honorary Member of the

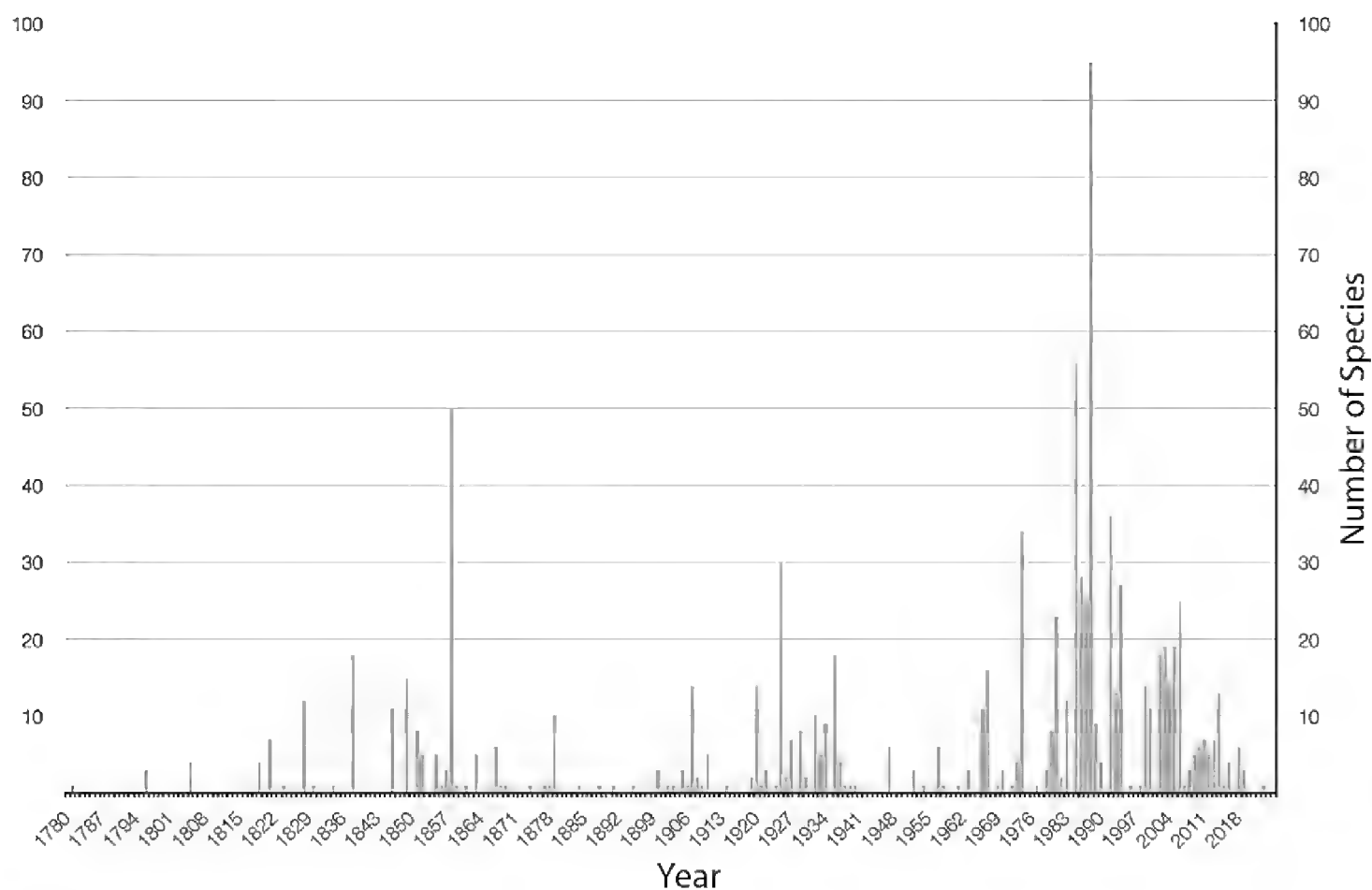


Figure 20. Summary of the accumulation of described southern African Asilidae species over time, from the first description in 1781 to the present day.

Congresses in 1994 (Kirk-Spriggs 2012). Also at ICD9, a symposium was organized by the senior author entitled, “Taxonomy and phylogeny of Asilidae – honouring 40 years of Afrotropical research by Jason Londt” to celebrate his career. Jason received a commemorative award with a newly described species, *Microphontes jasonlondti* Markee & Dikow, 2018, at the symposium (Fig. 19).

Jason’s outstanding ability to collect and mount assassin flies, flies in general, and other insects will impact the discovery of new southern African species for many years. One way to visualize his impact in adding specimens to the collection at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum and his study of specimens from many other natural history museums is through his Bionomia record at <https://bionomia.net/0000-0001-8308-3718>. This summary, based on the recordedBy (collector) and identifiedBy (identifier) fields of specimen data submitted by natural history museums around the world to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF, www.gbif.org), illustrates how many specimens Jason has handled both while pinning freshly killed flies and studying them to put an identification label on them. The number of records aggregated (currently 9,860 records for collected by and 1,486 records for identified by) will only increase as more and more specimen data are captured in entomological collections around the world and attributed by Bionomia scribes. In addition, a project is underway by Plazi (plazi.org) and the senior author to liberate in a machine-readable format all of Jason’s taxonomic revisionary studies. An example is the revision of *Smeryngolaphria* Hermann, 1912 (Londt 1989), which is available in open access at Plazi TreatmentBank (<https://tb.plazi.org/GgServer/summary/FFD2FF9D1015FFF28C64FF9ACE650454>) with the taxonomic treatments

individually captured and at Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1472869>) with treatments and figures citable with individual DOIs.

Jason has contributed immensely over a career of 43 years of publishing on Asilidae to the understanding of species diversity and ecological roles of assassin flies in sub-Saharan Africa. Describing 580 species of Afrotropical Asilidae alone is an amazing feat and far outnumbers other dipterists studying the Afrotropical fauna such as Harold Oldroyd (144 valid Afrotropical Asilidae species, described between 1939–1974), Gertrude Ricardo (80, 1900–1925), Hermann Loew (77, 1851–1873), or Stanley W. Bromley (69, 1927–1952) to name but a few. Likewise, in terms of capturing the generic diversity, Jason described 45 new Afrotropical genera (1977–2015), all of which are still valid, eclipsing Hermann Loew (26 valid genera, 1847–1873), Friedrich Hermann (13, 1906–1926), Harold Oldroyd (7, excluding replacement names, 1959–1974) and Frank M. Hull (7, 1958–1962).

In a way, the summary chapter on assassin flies in the *Manual of Afrotropical Diptera* (Londt and Dikow 2017) with a key to all Afrotropical genera, its many photographs of flies in nature and from the collection, and up-to-date summaries of their diversity can be regarded as a tribute to Jason's exceptional knowledge of these charismatic flies.

Festschrift summary

Following this introduction, this Festschrift includes three articles on Jason's impact on entomology. Firstly, a catalogue of the types Jason deposited or designated at the Natural History Museum, London was compiled by Erica McAlister and Peter Wing. Kirstin Williams, Jacobus Steenkamp and Louwrens Snyman summarize Jason's general collection at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum and Martin Villet gives an overview of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum Cicadidae collection. Five papers describing new species in Jason's honour, one hangingfly and four true flies, follow this. John Midgley and Terence Bellingan describe a new *Bittacus* (Mecoptera, Bittacidae) a genus in which more than quarter of the Afrotropical species were described by Jason. Shaun Winterton, Michael Irwin and Jonas Mortelmans describe a new *Neotherevella* (Diptera, Ther-evidae), Bradley Sinclair describes a new *Wiedemannia* (Diptera, Empididae), John Midgley, Terence Bellingan and Kurt Jordaens describe a new *Amphoterus* (Diptera, Syrphidae) and finally, Torsten Dikow and Meliah Dubus describe a new *Anypodetus* (Diptera, Asilidae) (Table 1).

Acknowledgements

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Appendix I. Publications by Jason Londt, in chronological order

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- Londt JGH (1970) A new species of *Bittacus* from South Africa (Mecoptera: Bittacidae). Journal of the Entomological Society of Southern Africa 33: 53–57.
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